

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: December 10, 2012

Agenda Item: Spring Coulee WMA Acquisition

Division: Fish and Wildlife

Action Needed: Final Approval

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 15 minutes

Background

A landowner approached FWP about donating property for wildlife conservation and public use. The property consists of 1,050 acres of deeded land in breaks habitat along the north shore of the Missouri River, approximately 13 miles southwest of Big Sandy. Adjacent to the property, there are 460 acres of public DNRC and BLM lands.

Nearly the entire property proposed for donation is native habitat, much of which is classified as Tier I habitat (i.e., mixed grass prairie, shrub-grassland, and riparian habitat). The grassland habitat above the breaks is primarily mixed-grass prairie dominated by western wheatgrass with small patches of Wyoming big sagebrush. Several branches of Spring Coulee traverse the property, comprising a mix of silver sagebrush grasslands, badlands, and greasewood flats. The property appears to provide good mule deer habitat and also supports antelope, sharp-tailed grouse, and a variety of nongame wildlife associated with mixed grass and shrub habitats. The property would provide recreational opportunity for hunters and recreationists floating the Missouri River.

Public Involvement Process & Results:

A draft environmental assessment was prepared and a public comment period ran Oct. 17 through Nov. 9. The draft EA was available to the public on the FWP website. In addition, copies of the EA were mailed to surrounding landowners and Choteau County Commissioners. There were two public notices of the acquisition in both the Havre Daily News and Great Falls Tribune. A public meeting was held in Havre on Oct 30. There were approximately 65 people at the meeting and seven of these people reported being in attendance for the Spring Coulee project. There was one verbal comment at the meeting expressing concerns regarding fencing of the property. There were nine written comments submitted on this project. Seven of the comments were in support of this project, one was opposed, and one did not directly support or oppose the acquisition.

Alternatives and Analysis

If this donation is not accepted, the property would likely be sold to another buyer. A new owner of the property could develop the property or implement management action that could result in the loss of the native wildlife habitats present on the property and would likely result in a loss of public access.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends accepting the donation of the Spring Coulee property

Proposed Motion

I move that the FWP Commission approve FWP's acceptance of the donation of the Spring Coulee property.